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ABSTRACT

Explores the following five dimensions of self-perception held by black urban male 10th-grade students in North Carolina: (1) scholastic competence; (2) athletic competence; (3) physical appearance; (4) behavioral conduct; and (5) job competence. Investigates differences in these aspects of self-concept for 30 students scoring above and 30 scoring below the fiftieth percentile on the California Achievement Test (CAT). Subjects were administered the Self-Perception Profile for Adolescents. Higher achievers possess a perception of greater academic competence, and they perceive themselves as more competent at athletics and better looking than do the lower achieving group. Achievers also perceive themselves as more capable at a part-time job, and they feel better about the way they behave. Students who did well on the CAT place a high value on academic achievement and perceive that they have the potential to do well. Included are five tables of study findings and a 14-item list of references. (SLD)

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Self-Perception and Achievement of Black Urban 10th Graders

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Introduction

A key question in the American Association of School Administrators survey on students at-risk asked, "What characteristic is most often identified in students inevitably bound for failure?" One-fourth of the administrators responding had a clear answer: "Poor self-image." The respondents also described this characteristic as "low self-esteem," "low self-concept," and "possessing negative attitudes toward self" (Brodinsky and Keough, 1989). A Vancouver, Washington study found: "Bad feelings about one's self impact negatively on the learning ability of adolescents. Adolescents who think they are dumb, stupid, or useless tend to give up; they demonstrate feelings of "I can't" and "It's too hard". Such a state of mind does not allow for learning. Fear of failure, of ridicule, of looking bad to others is a dominant blockage of the insecure learner. A.H. Maslow asserted that the goal of every human being is self-actualization - that is, becoming the kind of person one want to become. Self-esteem aids that drive. Self-esteem helps individuals to sense they can take charge of their lives.

The purpose of this study was to explore five selected dimensions of self-perception held by Black urban 10th grade male students. The five domains explored were Scholastic Competence, Athletic Competence, Physical Appearance, Behavioral Conduct, and Job Competence.

The domains were selected by the school counselors. By examining the domains, it is anticipated that information would emerge that would offer some insight into the nature of these students that would better assist them in taking charge of their lives. It was additionally anticipated that this information would hold useful instructional implications for improvement of the education of Black urban male students nationally.

In the ninth annual report on the status of minorities in education, the American Council on Education recently revealed that the gap between the high school graduation rates of 18 to 24 year old Whites and Blacks narrowed during the 1970s and early 1980s and the number of degrees earned by Blacks increased as well between 1987-89. In fact, 30.8 percent of Blacks in that age group were attending college in 1989, while Whites made up a slightly bigger percentile of 38.8 and Hispanics constituted 28.7 percent. However, the study noted that the percentage of Black males graduating from high schools remained constant throughout the 1970s and early 1980s. According to the report, gains for Blacks were attributed primarily to headway made by Black females, who enrolled in college at significantly higher rates than Black males.

Specifically in 1989, 33.8 percent of the Black women ages 19 to 24 who completed high school were attending college, while only 27.1 percent of their male counterparts were enrolled in a higher learning institution. Exploring the aforementioned domains of self-perception may offer insight and yield possible solutions to this problem. However, initially it is vital that concepts such as "self-esteem" and "self-concepts" are clearly understood.

Concepts such as "self-esteem", "self-concept" and perceived competence" have become central to formulations emerging from social learning theory (Bandura 1977), self-perception theory (Bem, 1972), social cognition (Lepper and Greene, 1978), and theories of competence and intrinsic motivation (Harter, 1981). At a more applied level, the enhancement of an individual's self-esteem is critical to clinicians, educators and program-evaluation researchers. Teachers intuitively know that when students feel better about themselves, they do better in school. The simple fact is that youngsters today are not receiving enough positive nurturing attention from either at home or at school. The reasons are numerous and complex but the result is that more and more students have low levels of self-esteem (Canfield, 1990).

Self-concept may be defined as a person's total appraisal of his/her appearance, background and origins, abilities and resources, attitudes and feelings which culminates as a directing force in his/her behavior (LaBenne and Greene, 1969). A person's perceptions of his/herself are formed through one's experience with interpretation of one's environment and are influenced especially by reinforcements, evaluations by significant others, and one's attribution for one's own behavior. Self-concept, therefore develops and is affected by cultural influence and feedback which a student receives over the years from others who reveal their perceptions to him or her. It is important to remember that self-concepts with its many dimensions are not unalterably fixed, but rather are modified by every life experience through at least the maturing years. A student may think better or worse of himself or herself in different situations and that person should, therefore, be provided with experiences in which positive feelings are nurtured.

Given the generally accepted proposition that a higher self-concept is desirable, it would appear that educators and psychologists have the responsibility to determine why self-concept changes, in what situations it is likely to occur, and in what direction it will change.

Thus examining change in self-concept with regard to educational environments will allow educators to create learning situations which will enhance the development of higher academic self-concept in adolescents. Students who perceived that their lives are satisfying and that they are competent should do well in the school milieu.

Studies have indicated some similarities and differences in self-concept across various backgrounds (Marchant, 1991). Jenson, White, and Galliher (1982) found that Blacks did not suffer from extremely poor self-concepts. Martinez and Dukes (1987) found that minorities tended to have lower levels of self-esteem than Whites on public (intelligence) aspect of self-esteem, but higher levels for private satisfaction with self. Although urban and rural eleventh-graders did have different occupational and educational aspirations, they did not differ in achievement motivation or locus of control (Zimbelman, 1987). This study will examine self-perception in a critical high school year (10th grade) of selected Black male urban students.

This critical year is characterized with many concerns by educators such as structural changes in the family, academic alienation, an increasing emphasis on devoting time to athletics rather than academics, much attention on "looking good" through the acquisition of expensive clothes and shoes, receiving a disproportionately amount of classroom punishment, and many times an excessive number of hours working on a job instead of on academic studies. The domains for this study were selected to address the concerns. Answers were sought ot five research questions:

1. Is there a significant difference ($p < .05$) between the Scholastic Competence scores on the self-perception instrument of the urban minority male 10th graders in the lower 50 percentile on the CAT versus the urban minority male 10th graders in the upper 50 percentile on the CAT?

2. Is there a significant difference ($p < .05$) between the Athletic Competence scores on the self-perception instrument of the urban minority male 10th graders in the lower 50 percentile on the CAT versus the urban minority male 10th graders in the upper 50 percentile on the CAT?

3. Is there a significant difference ($p < .05$) between the Physical Appearance scores on the self-perception instrument of the urban minority male 10th graders in the lower 50 percentile on the CAT versus the urban minority male 10th graders in the upper 50 percentile on the CAT?

4. Is there a significant difference ($p < .05$) between the Job Competence scores on the self-perception instrument of the urban minority male 10th graders in the lower 50 percentile on the CAT versus the urban minority male 10th graders in the upper 50 percentile on the CAT?

5. Is there a significant difference ($p < .05$) between the Behavioral Conduct scores on the self-perception instrument of the urban minority male 10th graders in the lower 50 percentile on the CAT versus the urban minority male 10th graders in the upper 50 percentile on the CAT?

Subjects

The source group consisted of 60 urban Black male 10th graders in North Carolina. Thirty of the students scored above the 50 percentile on the California Achievement Test (CAT) (Mean = 39.06, Standard Deviation = 7.35). This group was named potential achievers. Thirty additional students were employed in the study that scored above the 50 percentile (Mean = 63.5, Standard Deviation = 11.10). This group was named achievers. It was the decision of this researcher and the high school counselors to use the CAT scores in this study because of the unavailability of grades. In a subsequent follow-up study at the end of the school year CAT scores and grades in selected courses will be employed. The 30 students were randomly selected from students who had permission slips from their parents to participate in the survey and who scored above the 50 percentile on the CAT. According to the high school counselors the 30 achievers generally were students with "B" averages.

Instrumentation

Self-Perception Profile for Adolescents

The Self-Perception Profile for Adolescents (Harter, 1985) was administered to the subjects as a whole group in the classes. The instrument taps perceptions of Scholastic Competence, Athletic Competence, Physical Appearance, Social Acceptance, and Behavioral Conduct, five specific domains, as well as Global Self-Worth. Each subscale provides a separate score, thereby allowing one to examine a profile of the child's evaluative judgements across domains. Underlying the construction of the adolescent's self-perception profile was the assumption that an instrument providing separate measures of perceived competence or adequacy in different domains, as well as an independent assessment of one's global self-worth, would be better than one providing only a single score (e.g., as in Coopersmith, 1967). The rationale and supportive evidence favoring such a domain-specific approach has been spelled out in detail in previous writings (Harter 1985, 1986, 1989). Adolescents clearly discriminate among the domains in the instrument, reporting different levels of adequacy depending upon the domain.

Thus, a procedure which merely sums across domain - specific items (as in the Coopersmith Self-Inventory) masks important discriminations that children and adolescents make in judging their sense of competence or adequacy in the various areas of their life. Only five of the nine domains was selected for use in this study. They are:

1. Scholastic Competence: This subscale taps the adolescent's perception of his/her competence or ability within the realm of scholastic performance, e.g. how well he/she is doing at classwork, and how smart or intelligent one feels one is.

2. Athletic Competence. Perceptions of his/her athletic ability and competence at sports, e.g., feelings that one is good at sports and athletic activities.

3. Physical Appearance. The degree to which the adolescent is happy with the way he/she looks, likes one's body, and feels that he/she is good-looking.

4. Behavioral Conduct. The degree to which one likes the way one behaves, does the right thing, acts the way one is supposed to, and avoids getting into trouble.

5. Job Competence. The extent to which the adolescent feels that he/she has job skills, is ready to do well at part-time jobs, and feels that one is doing well at the job he/she has.

The actual questionnaire, filled out by the 10th grader is entitled "What I am Like". An example of a question is:

Really True for me	Sort of True for me	Some teenagers do very well at their classwork

BUT

Other teenagers don't do very well at their classwork	Sort of True for me	Really True for me

The 10th grader is first asked to decide which kind of teenager is most like him, and then asked whether this is only sort of true or really true for him. The effectiveness of this question format lies in the implication that half of the teenagers in the world (or in one's reference group) view themselves in one way, whereas the other half view themselves in the opposite manner. That is, this type of question legitimizes either choice. The internal consistency for the subscales are presented below.

	Scholastic	Athletic	Appearance	Conduct	Job
Sample	.91	.90	.89	None	.93

Number of Subjects in Harter's Sample = 48

Subscale Means and Standard Deviations (S.D.s) Harter's Sample for 10th Grade Boys on the Selected Domains

Domain	Means	S.D.s
Scholastic	2.8	.70
Athletic	2.9	.78
Appearance	2.9	.70
Conduct	2.7	.54
Job Competence	3.1	.48

California Achievement Test (CAT)

The CAT has been a well respected test for over 50 years. Its purpose is to measure achievement in the basic skills commonly found in state and district curricula. The CAT utilizes multiple-choice items at all levels. According to a review in BUROS Mental Measurement Yearbook, the genealogy of the items, from the identification of the objectives to be measured to the writing, editing, reviewing, and final selection is excellent. Evidence that the construct measured in the various subtests is related to instruction is provided by data showing that mastery of an objective increases with grade level and, within grade level, on Spring compared to Fall test administrations. Intercorrelations among the subtests of the CAT are relatively high, in the .5 to .8 range. Further the correlation between total scale score on the CAT Form E and total scale score on the Test of Cognitive Skills ranges from .6 at Level 13 to .8 at Level 16.

The within-level Kuder Richardson 20 internal consistency reliabilities for the subtests and total test score generally are high. Above the kindergarten and early first grade level tests, where smaller numbers produce reliabilities in the high .6s and .7s, the internal consistency reliabilities are typically in the high .8s and .9s. Stability reliabilities for tests in levels 10, 11, and 12 of the CAT are in the .8 to .95 range. Overall, the stability, equivalence, and internal consistency of the test scores are high.

Procedures

The research design was causal-comparative. The independent variable was CAT scores (upper and lower 50 percentile). Students were divided into two groups on the independent variable. The two groups were potential achievers and achievers. The dependent variable was the self-perception scores for the five domains. T-tests were used to examine each of the five domains. The group of achievers were selected to be as similar as possible to the potential achievers. The major difference between the two group was the independent variable. Permission was obtained and this researcher and a graduate student administered the surveys. The assistant principal of instruction gave each student his/her CAT score to write it on the surveys. Surveys were collected and scored using Harter's scoring instrument. Means were computed for all domains. Data were analyzed using SPSSX on the VAX/VMS. T-Tests, means and standard deviations were computed for the five research questions.

Procedures

For research question number one there was a statistically significant difference ($t = -6.13$, $p = .017$). The achievers Scholastic Competence scores were significantly greater than the potential achievers scores. Data for question number one are presented in table 1.

TABLE 1
Means and Standard Deviations for Scholastic Competence Scores

Group	n	M	SD
Potential Achievers	30	2.68	.46
Achievers	30	3.29	.29

For research question number two there was a statistically significant difference ($t = 5.67$, $p = .006$). The potential achievers Athletic Competence scores were significantly greater than the achievers scores.

TABLE 2

Means and Standard Deviations for Athletic Competence Scores

Group	n	M	SD
Potential Achievers	30	3.31	.31
Achievers	30	2.69	.52

For research question number three there was a statistically significant difference ($t = .98$, $p = .018$). The potential achievers Physical Appearance scores were significantly greater than the achievers scores.

TABLE 3

Group	n	M	SD
Potential Achievers	30	3.07	.47
Achievers	30	2.92	.72

For research question number four there was a statistically significant difference ($t = -4.17$, $p = .007$). The achievers Job Competence scores were significantly greater than the potential achievers scores.

TABLE 4
Means and Stand Deviations for Job Competence Scores

Group	n	M	SD
Potential Achievers	30	2.44	.68
Achievers	30	3.11	.40

For research question number five there was a statistically significant difference ($t = -3.78$, $p = .011$). The achievers Behavioral Competence scores were significantly greater than the potential achievers scores.

TABLE 5
Means and Standard Deviations for Behavioral Competence Scores

Group	n	M	SD
Potential Achievers	30	2.57	.68
Achievers	30	3.12	.41

Discussion

The findings for research question number one was expected and are consistent with the majority of literature. The achievers possessed a perception of greater competence or ability within the realm of scholastic performance. The achievers felt better about their performance doing classwork. However, the responses to questions 2 and 3 were surprising. The potential achievers perceptions of athletic ability and competence at sports were greater than the achievers. They perceived themselves to be very good at sports and athletic activities. The potential achievers were also happier with their "looks". They believed they were more "good-looking".

Many of the potential achievers devoted a tremendous amount of time to school and recreational sports such as basketball and football instead of academic endeavors such as homework and test/quiz preparation. These students identified greatly with athletes such as Magic Johnson or Michael Jordan. They somehow believed they would have a successful career as an athlete.

It is important for the curriculum to emphasize to the potential achievers that there are 35 million African-Americans but only 1200 Black professional athletes in the United States. There are 12 times more Black lawyers than Black athletes, 3 times more Black dentists than Black athletes, and 15 times more Black doctors than Black athletes. Their chances of matching the achievements of General Colin Powell or Governor Wilder are greater than matching the achievements of Magic Johnson or Michael Jordan. Educators must teach the students that there are better avenues of opportunity than sports.

The potential achievers high perception of being "good-looking" can be employed as a powerful positive reinforcement tool for the classroom teacher, counselor and school administrator.

Instead of focusing on negative behaviors and constantly providing the students with signals indicating academic inadequacy, educators can endeavor to enhance good social-relationships with the students by providing specific praise about the physical appearance of the students. Comments in public as the students are entering the classroom will make the students feel good about themselves in front of their peers. Praise should also be given in private and in the close vicinity of teachers and parents. This would help to establish a warm and supportive classroom environment for the potential achievers that will lead to better scholastic performance.

The data for questions 4 and 5 indicate that achievers perceive themselves to be more capable of doing better at a part-time job. They are also quicker to avoid getting into trouble and feel better about the way they behave. This was expected and is consistent with the majority of literature. These students place a higher value on academic achievement. They perceive that they have good academic skills that will serve them well in the job market. The achievers realize that there is a high positive correlation between avoiding getting in trouble and academic achievement.

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